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THE BULGARIAN NATIONALITY OF THE MACEDONIANS

*By V. K. Sugareff, M.A., Special Delegate of the Congress of
Macedonian Bulgars in the United States
to the Mid-European Union*

One of the most difficult problems, which the Peace Conference in Paris, would have to solve, is to decide the future status of Macedonia—the apple of contention among the Balkan States. No one, who is acquainted with Balkan politics at all, will dispute the fact that the crux of the Balkan problem is the Macedonian Question. Therefore, an equitable solution of it will provide the surest basis for a lasting peace in the Balkans. The present occupation of Macedonia by the Greek and the Serbian forces does not alter the difficulties involved in the question. It constitutes merely a holding in suspense of the final settlement of this intricate problem. There are, however, several obstructions which may lead to misunderstanding and cause a consequent dissatisfaction in deciding the nationality of the Macedonians.

The question of races in Macedonia is an important factor in the solution of the Macedonian question, but it is not beyond any hope of settlement. Macedonia does present a babel of races, creeds and tongues, which, in a way, baffles the ingenuity of the ethnographer, theologian, and the philologist, but these fragments of peoples represent a small minority in all the districts where either Greek, Serbian or Bulgarian population predominates. The regions west of Schar Mountain are inhabited mostly by Serbians. The western, central and the eastern parts of Macedonia are preeminently Bulgarian. The territory along the littoral of the Aegean Sea and southwest of the cazas of Voden and Castoria is decidedly Greek. A valid

guarantee for the rights of the minority will put the racial question in the background.

A confusion may result from the consummate authority and finality with which the Greeks and the Serbians speak in discussing the Macedonian Question. Thus the Greeks employ the geographical term, Macedonia, as if the whole of Macedonia were Greek, by race, language and customs. The Serbians speak of it in the same sense when they refer to "old Serbia." and Macedonia. The Bulgarians only have used that term in referring to Macedonian territory in which the Bulgarian element is in the majority of the population. This vague use of the geographical name of Macedonia has created many conflicting opinions concerning the nationality of the Macedonians.

The Greeks have also invoked the assistance of religion in their claims on Macedonia. Their reasoning in this respect bristles with inconsistency. No contemporary political thinker will consider religion as an essential attribute of nationality, but the Greeks still persist to use religion as a synonym of nationality. Thus if a man were of the Greek orthodox faith, and if he were under the jurisdiction of the Greek patriarch of Constantinople he was *ipso facto* Greek regardless of his race or language. The Greek patriarchate of Constantinople has had the monopoly in matters of religion and education of all the Christians in European Turkey for centuries. The Patriarchs have used their authority to impose the Greek nationality on the Bulgarians. The native schools were abandoned, the native literature was destroyed, and the Greek language was forced upon the people. In fact, they were registered in the Church books as *Roume Millet*—Greek people. Nothing could have been more advantageous than the lapse of centuries during which they could have Hellenized the Macedonian Bulgar, but they have failed. Their crude and oriental methods were the means by which the national consciousness of the Bulgarians was awakened and led to the establishment of their independent church—an evidence that being under the jurisdiction of the Greek patriarch does not make a man Greek any more than an

American Catholic would be considered an Italian because the Pope of Rome is the head of the Catholic Church. But the Greeks have gone one step further. They have compiled statistics to prove on paper, at least, that the Macedonians are Greeks. We shall waive any refutation on this point because statistics, valuable though they may be, are always opened to the imputation of bias.

The opinion of foreign authorities, some of whom know intimately the people of Macedonia, has been sought by all the contending parties in order to influence American public opinion but we shall not rely much upon it because it has been exploited enough. How then is the nationality of the Macedonians to be determined?

This question can be properly answered in the words of President Wilson who said that the Balkan problem should be settled "along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality."¹ It is along such lines that the nationality of the Macedonian Bulgars has been indisputably established. The governments of Europe have confirmed on several occasions the Bulgarian nationality of the Macedonian peasants. The population itself has dared to assert its Bulgarian nationality in the face of Turkish, Greek and Serbian opposition.

Let us first consider how official Europe has created the map of Bulgaria in the Balkan Peninsula. The ecclesiastical oppression which the Bulgarian peasants had to endure was degrading enough, but it was at the same time, the only vehicle by which they could asseverate their national consciousness. In the early decades of the last century a campaign was inaugurated for an independent Bulgarian church. It was fundamentally a political movement conducted under the guise of religion. The Greek bishops condemned it on the ground that it was against the tenets of the Eastern church, which does not recognize racial distinction. The Bulgarian patriots, however, had calculated that it was the least expensive way from every point of view for the Bulgarian people to

¹ President Wilson's message to Congress, January 8, 1918.

establish their nationality and also strike a fatal blow at Pan-Hellerism—a herculian undertaking for a people against whom no political or intellectual obstruction had been spared to stifle the buoyancy of its national enthusiasm. For nearly forty years it had to be pounded into the heads of the Greek patriarchs and the Sultans of Turkey that the Bulgar was not going to relinquish what he had started to accomplish and that resistance was merely fanning the national fire into blaze. And thus on March 11, 1870 the Porte, disgusted with the Patriarch's dilatory methods in settling the church question issued the famous Firman, establishing the separate Bulgarian church.² This official act of the Turkish government was the most important event in the history of the Bulgarian renaissance. It was the foundation upon which the political structure of contemporary Bulgaria was built. Needless to say, the Porte was following its time honored policy of *divide et impera* in establishing the Bulgarian church, but it was not conscious that the Firman was creating a new nation within the Ottoman Empire. The tenth article of the Firman roughly demarcated the boundaries of the Bulgarian church. It included the dioceses of Nish, Pirot (both annexed to Serbia in 1878), Voden and several other in eastern Macedonia.³ This article contained also the following provision: if the inhabitants of a locality (other than those above mentioned) express a desire, unanimously or at least three-fourths of the population, to come under the jurisdiction of the exarchate, and if their wish is well established, it will be granted to them.⁴ This provision was the bulwark of the Bulgarian regeneration in Macedonia, for four years had not passed when the inhabitants of Skopie (Uskup) and the Ochrida dioceses demanded Bulgarian bishops. In order to ascertain whether the majority of the population was Bulgarian, a plebescite was taken, the result of which was that three-fourths of the people accepted the exarchate.

² Richard Von Mach, *The Bulgarian Exarchate*, pp. 11-28.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

⁴ Prince Gregoire Troubetzkoi, "La Politique Russe en Orient," in *Revue d'histoire Diplomatique*, Vol. 21 (1907), p. 396.

And by the end of the year 1874, the representatives of the powers recognized the predominance of the Bulgarian element in the districts of Bulgarian Morava, Skopie, Monastiri, and Castoria.⁵ The significance of the Church question was that through the many years of struggle for a free church the European powers recognized the existence of the Bulgarian people in the Turkish Empire; that it indicated, in a general way, where the Bulgarians constituted the majority of the population in Macedonia; and that it established a precedent for the Constantinople Conference to follow in formulating the map of Bulgaria.

The Constantinople Conference, which was held in the year 1876 at Constantinople, established the political map of Bulgaria along ethnographical lines. According to the project, which was written by Prince Tzerteleff, Secretary of the Russian Embassy, and Mr. Eugene Schuyler, the American Consul General at Constantinople, Bulgaria was to be divided into two administrative provinces—the eastern and the western. The latter province with which we are concerned was composed of the districts of Sofia, Vidin, Nish, Uskup, Monastir, Castoria, Veles, Tickvesh, Doiran, Strumitza, Melnik, and Nevrokop.⁶ After he had put the government of Bulgaria on paper, Mr. Schuyler, who knew thoroughly the Balkans wrote: “The Bulgarian constitution is done and has been accepted by Salisbury as a basis of discussion. I think it will get through without a great many modifications, and what I am chiefly interested in is that Bulgaria be left as a unity instead of being divided into several separate provinces.”⁷ Sefat Pasha, the president of the Conference, admitted that the Bulgarian constitution aimed to include all the Bulgarians of European Turkey into two provinces in which the Bulgarian element would predominate, but he doubted the wisdom of the plan because it will create distinct racial divisions within the empire.⁸ Marquise of Salisbury, the

⁵ A. Ischirkov, *Les Confins Occidentaux des Terres Bulgares*, p. 86.

⁶ *Blue Book, Turkey No. 2*, p. 52 (1878).

⁷ Eugen Schuyler, *Selected Essays*, pp. 91-92.

⁸ *Blue Book, Turkey No. 2*, pp. 334-335 (1878).

special delegate from England, said: "The word 'Bulgaria' did not indicate a district of which the geographical limits have been confined. To give it a practical meaning the plenipotentiaries have been obliged to take into consideration the origin of the word itself, and the sense in which it is at present employed."⁹ The delegates of the Conference were endeavoring to apply the constitution to the two provinces in which the majority of the population was Bulgarian. Though they adopted the constitution with minor changes, yet it was doomed to be a failure. For the Turkish government to counteract the interference of foreign powers in the internal affairs of the empire, proclaimed a new constitution by which it guaranteed practically all national rights to the people. It was merely a throwing dust in the eyes of Europe. The constitution became a dead letter immediately after its proclamation. Thus the conference did not succeed in reforming Turkey, but it definitely described the western frontiers of Bulgarian Macedonia.¹⁰

But Russia, the self appointed defender of the Christians in Turkey, was not satisfied with the result of the Conference. If the concert of Europe failed to accomplish what it proposed to Turkey, her mighty army was to execute the will of the powers. The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 was terminated by the treaty of San Stefano. The sixth article of this treaty stipulated the so-called "United Bulgaria." This was the realization of the long cherished hope when all the Bulgarian territory in the Balkan Peninsula was united under one flag. It embraced the whole of Bulgarian Macedonia without the city of Salonica, and a part of Thrace.¹¹ But it was an ephemeral union. Europe was then suffering from a Russophobic nightmare. Her leading statesmen argued that "United Bulgaria" would be the vanguard of Russian diplomacy in her slow but sure march towards Constantinople and the Aegean Sea. England, then the spokesman of Europe, formally de-

⁹ *Blue Book, Turkey No. 2*, p. 340 (1878).

¹⁰ *Ibid*, No. 13, map (1878).

¹¹ *Blue Book, Turkey, No. 23* (1878). See map.

manded that the San Stefano Treaty should be submitted for consideration before a European Congress. Russia was bound to yield to the collective will of Europe. And the Berlin Congress was convened on June 13, 1878. The result of the Congress was a national tragedy for Bulgaria. The Berlin Treaty completely abrogated that of San Stefano. For Bulgaria, like Gaul, was divided into three parts, the principality of Bulgaria, the autonomous eastern Roumalia, and Macedonia, which was left to the mercy of the Turks. Crushing as this blow was at their national aspirations, yet it did not dishearten the patient and calculating Bulgars.

From the time of the Berlin Congress until the year 1912, the Bulgarian statesmen have never ceased to work for the annexation of Bulgarian Macedonia. That was well nigh impossible without an understanding among the Balkan States for an equitable partition of Macedonia. The *Ante Bellum* Treaty which was concluded between Bulgaria and Serbia provided the nucleus for the Balkan League. The Serbian government pledged its honor that Bulgarian Macedonia should be annexed to Bulgaria. A small section of it was designated as the "disputed zone," for which the Czar of Russia was to act as an arbitrator in case the Allies could not agree upon a settlement. A succession of diplomatic blunders led to the disruption of the Balkan League and the consequent occupation of Macedonia by the Greeks and the Serbians became a fatal reality.

There is no need to explain these official facts. They clearly point out that official Europe has incontrovertibly confirmed the Bulgarian nationality of the Macedonian peasants. The foreign traveler may be irreconcilably influenced by one of the contending parties, but it is impossible to think that the representatives of the European powers could be deceived to favor the Bulgarians. These official decisions were based not only upon the ethnographical knowledge of the people, but also upon the indefatigable efforts of the Macedonian Bulgars to unite with Bulgaria. Lack of space impels us to state only few of the many out-

standing manifestations of national enthusiasm among the Macedonians.

Here again we find ourselves in conflict with the Greek pretention that the Macedonians are Greeks by sentiment and that they pray and hope for Greece. It follows, then, that they are Greeks by choice regardless of their nationality and language. This is a liberal attitude towards nationalism with which the writer is in sympathy. It has worked here in the United States where there is no friction between national ideals and aspirations. And the foreigner has been unconsciously assimilated under the influence of one flag, one language and one ideal. But can this be said of Europe which is checkered by small nations? The nation-alistic movement, which during the nineteenth century resulted in the formation of the German Empire, the Italian kingdom, and the liberation of the several Balkan States militates against its practicability so far as Europe is concerned. In fact, it is not in accord with the political principles which the Paris Peace Conference has accepted as the only basis to settle international disputes—"along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality." Let us grant that the Macedonians are Greeks by sentiment, but historical evidence proves that the Greek pretention is merely an academic assumption. There is an abundance of facts which dispel any doubt that the Macedonian Bulgars are not sentimentally Bulgarian. For the sake of clearness repetition, here, becomes necessity, but only so far as it bears upon the point of issue.

Dr. Danev, formerly premier of Bulgaria, is the authority for the statement that Macedonia is the mother of Bulgarian civilization. This sentence fully expresses the evolution of Bulgaria as an independent state,—that evolution had its foundations in Macedonia. While religion does not determine one's nationality, yet it was through the channel of religion that the Macedonian Bulgar has asserted his national consciousness. The religious movement was formulated at Skopie and Veles in the year 1833 and 1834 respectively.¹² Here in "Old Serbia" the leaders

¹² Von Mach, *The Bulgarian Exarchate*, p. 11.

of the movement demanded that the Bulgarian dioceses should have a native bishop or one who can conduct church services and preach in their native language; that the dioceses should have the right to recommend their own bishops; and that the Greek language should not be used in their churches and schools.¹³ In the later stage of the movement the inhabitants of the dioceses of Ochrida, Prilep, Monastir, Veles, Uskup, Dibra, Strumitza and Nevrokop addressed a petition to the Porte requesting that the Bulgarian nation be authorized to organize a separate church.¹⁴ A committee of six, three of whom were Greeks and three Bulgarians, was appointed to work out a plan by which the church dispute between Bulgars and Greeks could be settled. This committee included, besides the above-mentioned dioceses, those of Melnik, Prishtina, Prezpa, and Moglenitza.¹⁵ This persistent desire for a national church could have been prompted only by the self-consciousness of a people, who could no longer endure the imposition of the Greek nationality upon them.

When the news from the Berlin Congress reached Bulgaria, the Macedonians, who hoped that Russia would prevail upon the Congress to keep Bulgaria united, were the first to protest against the decision of the powers. Several districts revolted. The insurgents were so desperately determined to defy the Turkish troops that an international commission was sent to promise a speedy enforcement of the reforms which were guaranteed to them by the Berlin Treaty.¹⁶ A more important incident at this time was the supposed intention of the Bulgarian exarch to move his residence to Philippopolis, Bulgaria. This would have been a serious blow to the national movement. The Bulgarian dioceses of Macedonia would be forced to pass under the

¹³ Cf. Prince G. Troubetzkoi, *Russia and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Viesnik Evropii*, Vol. 3 (1902), p. 19 (Russian). Also Historicus, *Bulgaria and Her Neighbors*, pp. 52-53.

¹⁴ T. St. Boormoff, *The Bulgaro-Greek Church Question*, Zbornik za Narodni Oomotvorenia, Vol. 15 (1898), p. 153 (Bulgarian).

¹⁵ T. St. Boormoff, *The Bulgaro-Greek Church Question*, Zbornik za Narodni Oomotvorenia, Vol. 15 (1898), p. 211.

¹⁶ *Blue Book, Turkey* No. 44 (1878). p. 20.

jurisdiction of the Greek Patriarch and the peasants would again become the unwilling slaves of Hellenism. Far from it. Patriotic meetings were held in the principal towns and cities and resolutions were adopted imploring His Beatitude to return to Constantinople. The people went so far in their patriotic rage, as to address an ultimatum to the Exarch and demanded that he either resume his duty at Constantinople as the head of the united Bulgarian Church or the Macedonian Bulgar would accept the spiritual jurisdiction of the Pope of Rome as the only alternative for the preservation of their nationality.¹⁷ The Exarch yielded to the demands of the people and under the church influence the Bulgarians remained nominally united until the Balkan Wars.

Though it pleased the European diplomacy to subject Macedonian Bulgars to a further suffering under the Turkish misrule, yet their national enthusiasm could not be quenched. After 1878 the leaders of the national movement inaugurated an educational campaign in Macedonia from which evolved one of the most highly organized revolutionary movements which the Balkans have ever seen. The educational programme was later abandoned and vigorous military preparations were undertaken with the hope of making a final demonstration against the will of the powers. And on August 2nd, 1903, a revolt broke out in the province of Monastir. The revolution was a hopeless struggle against tremendous odds but it was a vindication that the native Bulgarian population of Macedonia was ready to sacrifice everything for its national freedom.

Add to this evidence of national enthusiasm the Bulgarian revolt of 1841 at Nish, Serbia, the several Macedonian regiments of volunteers, who fought against Serbia in 1885, and the army of Macedonian volunteers, several thousands of whom went from the United States, in the Bulgarian forces during the Balkan Wars, and the answer to the question, whether the Macedonians are Greek or Bulgarian by sentiment, is obvious. Mr. H. N. Brailsford

¹⁷ Simeon Radeff, *The Builders of Contemporary Bulgaria* (Bulgarian), pp. 96-106.

in his competent work, *Macedonia, Its Races and Their Future*, says: "My impression is that the more democratic Bulgarian movement really has the sympathy of the large number of the peasants who are 'Greeks' from fear or calculation. . . . I fancy that a plebescite would show that even in the districts of Vodena, Morichovo, and Serres, where Greek influence is still strong among the Slavs, the vast majority of the peasants would prefer to enrol themselves as Bulgarians rather than as Greeks."¹⁸ Mr. Brailford's fancy has been substantiated here in the United States. The Macedonian Bulgars, enjoying the freedom of speech and the right to assemble, have convened two congresses. The first Congress was held in the year 1913 at Chicago, Ill. The delegates representing every district of Bulgarian Macedonia appealed to the civilized governments of the world for the right to use their language in their churches and schools of their native land, which had been recently subjected to Greek and Serbian oppression. The second Congress was held in the year 1918 at Chicago, Ill. The delegates unanimously adopted President Wilson's fourteen points. They also strongly endorsed a union with Bulgaria, or, if that were impossible, an autonomous Macedonia should be established under a European protection.

These Congresses forcibly convey the conviction that the Macedonian Bulgars desire a union with Bulgaria and what they would choose to be if there were created such liberal conditions in Macedonia as exist in the United States.

It is hardly necessary to explain the evidence which these points bring out. They show that the Bulgarians from Macedonia and Bulgaria have a common history. They have both worked and fought for their national unity. They are one race, speak the same language, and have the same future aspiration. If ever the Macedonian peasants prayed and hoped for Greece, one will have to admit the painful truth that they have done it through the Greek priests and teachers who are the political and spiritual agents of Pan-Hellenism in Macedonia.

¹⁸ H. N. Brailsford, *Macedonia*, p. 198.

The basis of Bulgaria's foreign policy has been the incorporation of all the Bulgars in the Balkan Peninsula within one independent state as demarcated by the Constantinople Conference and the Treaty of San Stefano. The Berlin Congress divided Bulgaria in order to satisfy England and Austria. Bulgaria was outraged at Bucharest in 1913 under the pretence that she was aiming at a Balkan hegemony and disturbing the "Balance of Power" in the Balkans. But the situation is widely different to-day. Europe is not trembling from Russian aggression. The Paris Peace Conference has decided upon Greater Greece and Greater Rumania. The united Yugoslavia is a realized dream. Consequently, the legend of Balkan hegemony has vanished, the "Balance of Power" Theory has been toppled, and what is more encouraging is that Austrian intrigues have disappeared. The Balkan States have never been freer from foreign machinations. It is the most opportune time to lay down the foundations for a Balkan confederation—a confederation which will at once guarantee the future intellectual and economic development of the Balkans and become a strong barrier against the encroaching tide of Germanism in the Near East. That will largely depend upon how much the Peace Conference at Versailles would do to remedy the evils of Berlin and Bucharest and by a generous application of President Wilson's fourth fundamental principle for a lasting peace which provides "that all well defined national aspirations shall be accorded the utmost satisfaction that can be accorded them without introducing new or perpetuating old elements of discord and antagonism that would be likely in time to break the peace of Europe and consequently of the world."¹⁹

¹⁹ President Wilson's address to Congress, February 11, 1918.